

**Vermont Mental Health Performance Indicator Project**  
Agency of Human Services, Department of Health, Division of Mental Health  
108 Cherry Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401

TO: Vermont Mental Health Performance Indicator Project  
Advisory Group and Interested Parties

FROM: John Pandiani, Joan Mongeon, and Olivia Hunter

DATE: April 7, 2006

RE: Gender and Criminal Justice Involvement

This week's PIP report examines gender differences in criminal justice involvement of public mental health service recipients and members of the general population in eight states. Analyses were originally conducted for the federal Center for Mental Health Services Uniform Reporting System (URS). This 8 state comparison was the topic of a recent presentation at the 2006 National GAINS Conference on System Transformation at the Interface of the Criminal Justice and Mental Health Systems in Boston.

In every state, data were drawn from administrative databases maintained by state mental health authorities and by state criminal justice agencies. Seven of the states are identified; one chose not to be identified. The analysis in one state (Oklahoma) used probabilistic record linkage procedures in conjunction with a variety of personal identifiers and other data elements. The analyses for the other states used Probabilistic Population Estimation to statistically estimate the number of individuals shared by the data sets.<sup>1</sup> These estimates are based on the distribution of dates of birth observed in the data sets compared to the distribution of dates of birth in the general population, without reference to any personally identifying information. Measures of criminal justice involvement include arrests, criminal charges, and correctional involvement.

In all eight states, men were substantially and significantly more likely than women to have criminal justice involvement in the general population and among mental health service recipients. In all eight states, however, the difference between rates of criminal justice involvement of men and women (relative risk) were substantially and significantly greater in the general population than among recipients of public mental health services. Men and women with mental illness were much more similar in terms of criminal justice involvement than men and women in the general population.

Differences in rates of criminal justice involvement of men and women have long been recognized: men are much more likely than women to get into trouble with the law.<sup>2</sup> Few studies, however, have examined differences in criminal justice involvement for male and female consumers of mental health services. Two European studies suggest that women with mental illness may have a greater elevated risk for criminal justice involvement than men with mental illness (compared to members of the general population).<sup>3,4</sup> Studies in Vermont have

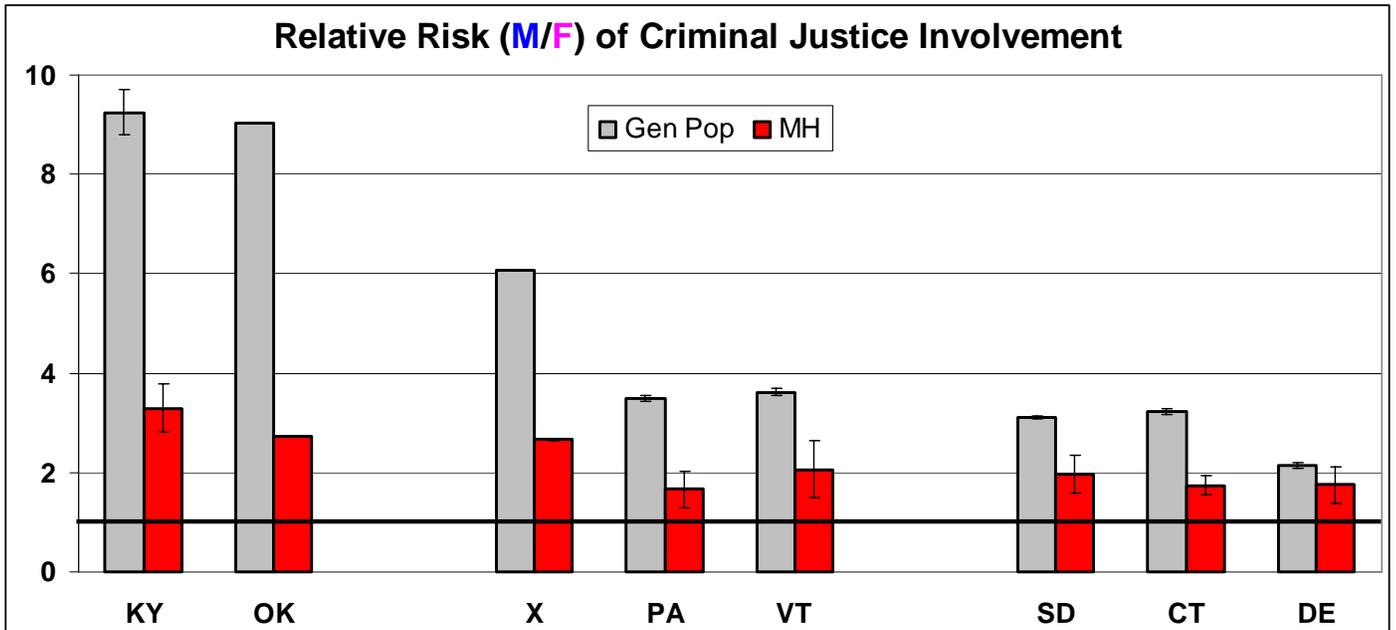
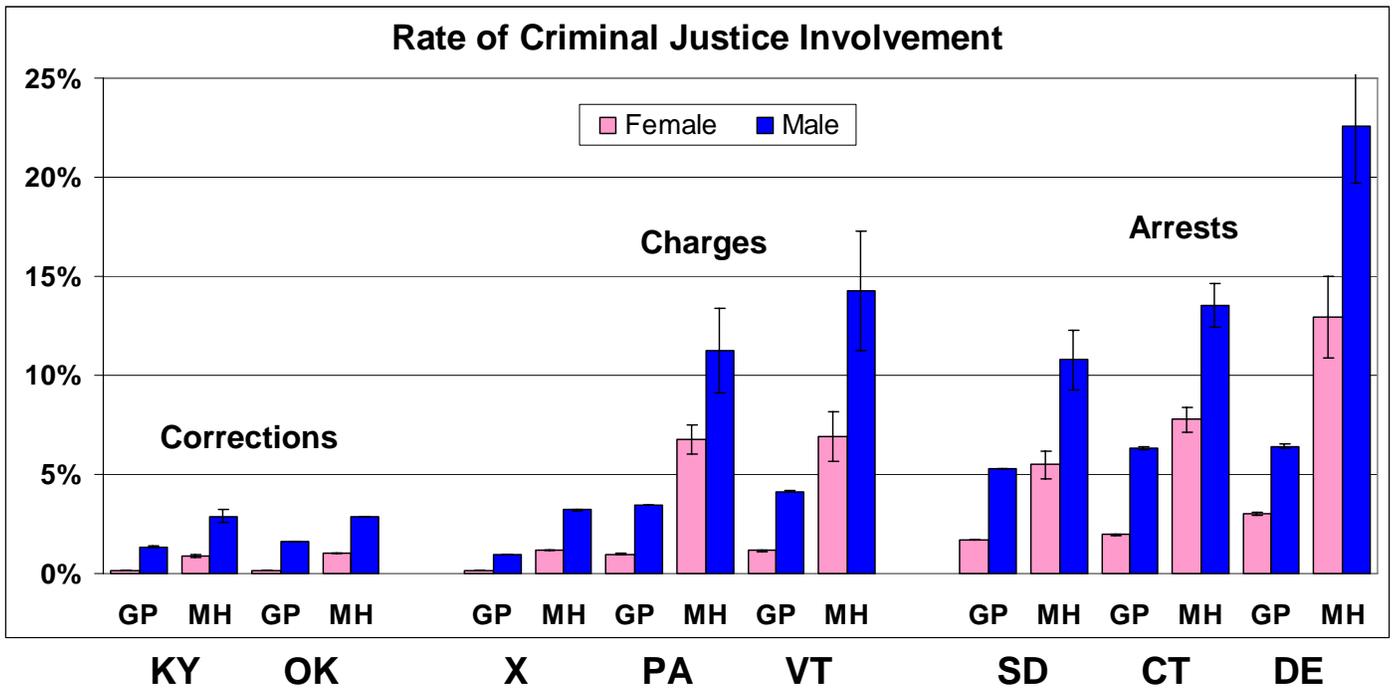
also found that the elevated risk of criminal justice involvement for female mental health service recipients is substantially greater than the elevated risk for male mental health service recipients (compared to members of the general population).<sup>5</sup> More recently, Robbins et al., found that the prevalence of violence among recently discharged psychiatric patients was similar for men and women.<sup>6</sup> Violence by men, however, was more likely to result in a serious injury and men were more likely than women to be arrested after committing a violent act.

We look forward to your questions, your comments on and explanations of the patterns found here, and your suggestions for further analyses of these data to [pip@vdh.state.vt.us](mailto:pip@vdh.state.vt.us) or 802.863.7249.

## REFERENCES

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- 2 Wilson JQ, Herrnstein RJ (1985) *Crime and Human Nature*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- 3 Lindquist P and Allebeck P (1990) Schizophrenia and crime: A longitudinal followup of 644 schizophrenics in Stockholm. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 157: 345-350.
- 4 Hodgins S (1992) Mental disorder, intellectual deficiency and crime: Evidence from a birth cohort. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 49: 476-483.
- 5 Pandiani JA, Banks SM, Clements W, and Schacht LM (2000) Elevated Risk of Being Charged with a Crime for People with a Severe and Persistent Mental Illness. *Justice Research and Policy* 2: 19-36.
- 6 Robbins PC, Monahan J, Silver E. (2003) Mental Disorder, Violence, and Gender. *Law and Human Behavior*. 27 (6) 561-571.

# Criminal Justice Involvement of the General Population and Mental Health Recipients in 8 States



Analysis is based on anonymous extracts from databases maintained by state agencies regarding consumers of public mental health services and criminal justice agencies. In 7 out of the 8 states, Probabilistic Population Estimation was used to determine caseload size and overlap because the data sets do not share unique person identifiers. Analysis for Oklahoma is based on direct linkage of their mental health and criminal justice data sets. Population data was obtained from the 2000 US Census Bureau website: <http://www.census.gov/>.

Relative Risk is the rate of Male criminal justice involvement divided by the rate of Female criminal justice involvement. A measure of 2.0 indicates that males are twice as likely as females to become involved in the criminal justice system.